TOPIC 3

“The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.” Evaluate this claim.

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The quotation above seems to imply that certain knowledge comes with making ethical decisions as to how and if it should be imparted. Although this may seem obvious, a different interpretation could be considered where it could be said that the knowledge we possess decides our ethics and values according to how our knowledge is expressed. In order to answer the question fully, we will need to consider the meaning of ‘Ethical responsibility’. “Ethical responsibility refers to the idea that you should do something to correct a harmful situation or prevent harm from happening”[[1]](#footnote-1) With this in mind we can raise the question, why should knowledge carry ethical responsibility? For deeper reflection, it is necessary to analyze a knowledge issue upon which I have come up with the following: To what extent do ethics and values affect the way in which knowledge is imparted? The most reasonable answer; I believe; is that an individual allows their ethics and principles to affect their decision according to their perception of the situation they are faced with. This will be discussed further in the essay using Ethics and Religion as areas of knowledge (AOK) and emotion, reason and perception as ways of knowing (WOK).

Let us begin with an example on a significant AOK related to the question, Ethics. You are sitting in an exam and you know the answers to some of the questions whereas your classmate doesn’t. If they ask you for help, do you have an ethical responsibility to impart that knowledge? It comes down to the point of thorough reflection of the following questions: Is it right or wrong for me to impart my knowledge in such a manner? Is it classed as cheating? Or simply helping your friend in their time of need? Our ethics play a big part in the decisions we make over certain things, whether intentionally or naturally as something normal. As of the situation presented above, primarily you would want help your friend in need as part of fulfilling your duties of friendship, accompanied by the thought that if chosen not to do so, conflict could arise between you. Despite that, both are aware that it would be classified as cheating which is an act that is universally incorrect to carry out. Exploring the theories that reside within the Ethics, I came across Kant’s theory; that states that the motive behind the action overrules the consequences of it. If you were to help your friend then your motive would be not to cheat, but instead to help your friend. The fact that it is cheating and thus morally incorrect would not matter. If you choose not to impart the knowledge during the exam, your motive of not wanting to cheat would be more important than the fact that your friend would get the answer wrong. Nevertheless, ignoring the importance of motive, people usually attempt to carry out the act if it is possible to. I came across two parts of the self-interest theory that could be applied in order to explain the reason for this. One is the hidden-benefits argument; which declares that the reason people carry out certain acts towards others is due to the fact that they would gain from it some way. In this case you could say that you would share knowledge you possess simply for the reason that if you come across a question that you do not know, your friend might be able to help you by carrying out the same act. In contrast, people may not actually choose to impart their knowledge in the form of cheating as getting caught doing such could give rise to major consequences. Here, the Fear of punishment argument would stand, which is self explanatory. As mentioned above in my thesis statement, I feel that it is left up to the individual whether they would like to share the knowledge they possess or not and in what way.

Secondly, Religion; being another significant AOK relating to the question; is a universal element of human life that revolves around belief in the existence of deity and serves the purpose of a guide or somewhat, a way of life. Although faith and religious beliefs cannot be proved or reasoned (which is an argument put forward by many), faith really is the only exception to knowledge. As science believes, the existence of deity cannot be proved and so theories are found as explanations for the subsistence of things. In contrast, Religion tends to carry ethical ideals[[2]](#footnote-2) upon which everyone is entitled to or not to believe in. It should be noted that the belief in religion does not always, in this day and age, influence the all decisions made especially considering the fact that different perceptions of religion are accepted globally. Some situations are regarded too small to be looked at from a religious stand however some are significantly large enough that religious views should be considered. For instance, in many religions, it is firmly highlighted that individuals marry someone with identical religious beliefs. If someone were to get involved with a partner from a different religion, they would have not stayed true to what their culture hence raising many questions within their society regarding their upbringing. Therefore I would say they were not ethically responsible with the decision made considering the aim of ethically responsibility. However the implication to this is that there are many people who might not be religious or have religious beliefs. As a result, such an act would not be considered ethically wrong and would be justified with portrayal of the argument that every individual having the right of being with the one they love; which in turn challenges the concept depicted by most religions. Yet again we are faced with the same answer of the knowledge issue as stated in my thesis statement; it depends on the individual themselves to contemplate on whether they would like to act upon the knowledge they possess or not with ethical responsibility being reflected on.

I was once told about the nerve-wracking challenges my mother had experienced during her pregnancy with me. With problems such as a low lying placenta, lack of nutrition and no foetal movement, the only two solutions were for her to either be put on medication; that came with consequences; or for the situation to be left as it was which would have eventually lead to me dying. Consequences included a change in the appearance of my mother in the sense that extra hair growth and weight would be gained. Should my mother had chosen to not take the medication, would it have been the gynecologist’s responsibility to try change her decision, whether ethically or professionally? Usually such decisions are made with emotions playing a significant role, thus the doctors emotions would also have triggered the desire to convince my mother to take the medication. When a substitute doctor had informed my mum that there was no way out, I would say the gynecologist to whom she was appointed to originally would have been ethically responsible to encourage his patient; and so he did.

Perception, as a WOK, relates to ones sensation and interpretation of what lies in front of them. Perception could be cultural; with traditions and beliefs justifying that what is seen is true; or simply a personal view supported by intuition. However there are three fundamental problems with perception being a WOK. The knowledge we acquire is always lacking in some way… either we misinterpret what we see, or unknowingly ignore something that is portrayed, or we may forget certain aspects of the knowledge we gain. Despite such complications, perception is one of the WOK we use in every aspect of life, including the intake and imparting of knowledge that occurs on a daily basis. There are different ways in which justification of our senses can be pertained. Out of three, I would say the most reasonable explanations to our reliance on perception are Phenomenalism; where experiences of the human world affect the way things are perceived; and Common Sense Realism; where our senses (including intuition as a second sense) are what we rely on in order to confirm our perceptions. The limitation to this would be the nature of our organs and the way in which they work, which lead us back to the three fundamental problems. Nevertheless, how we perceive things and how that affects the knowledge we intake or partake, plays a substantial part in the areas of knowledge.

Reason can be categorized into two main types: deductive reasoning and informal reasoning. Considering our knowledge issue, informal reasoning; which is also further broken down into various parts; would be the most logical explanation of how reason could be applied as a WOK when determining the extent upon which ethics and values affect how our knowledge is imparted. Linking Reason to Religion, Ad Ignorantism; which states that there is no evidence to disprove the factor[[3]](#footnote-3); would be the most sensible explanation of how faith in its own way is a form of knowledge, hence religious values being the influence of how knowledge should be imparted would not be regarded as wrong.

Reflecting upon the essay and the knowledge issue, to what extent do ethics and moral values affect the way in which knowledge is imparted?, I can say that my thesis statement was fairly correct. We can generalize morals based on moral relativism, but if so then how who decides what people should know? Doesn’t everyone have the right to know everything? Does how we impart our knowledge define who we are? Religion or simply the values you are brought up with, affect the way in which one perceives certain situations they are put in. Knowledge is imparted according to our diverse emotions; reason and possibly intuition and these factors are what make us who we are. Due to existing moral values, be it universal or personal, one naturally feels obliged to carry ethical responsibility with the knowledge they possess. The major limitation of the arguments made in this essay is that despite complete attempt to fairly discuss different perspectives, as a knower, some of the points made may have been biased in some way, with my age and personal beliefs possibly being a slight influence too.

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1. <http://blog.tok-essay.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://bmis.wikispaces.com [↑](#footnote-ref-3)